



Voices
of



Children



Raised by Grandparents
and
Other Relatives

2009



Voices of Children 2009

Voices of Children

Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives

2009

A compilation of poems, essays and drawings submitted from children living in Washington State to the 2009 Voices of Children Contest.

Initiated by the Washington State Relatives as Parents (RAPP) Program and the Kinship Oversight Committee.

Coordinated by:

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To order more copies of this booklet or for additional information about the 2009 Voices of Children Contest contact Shelly Willis at:
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This booklet can also be found online at :
www.dshs.wa.gov/kinship

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Voices of Children Raised by their Grandparents or Other Relatives 2009 Contest

Foreword

Most children find safety and comfort in the arms and care of their family, including grandparents and other relatives. For more than 2 million children in the USA, living with a grandparent, aunt, uncle or other family member has become a permanent or long-term arrangement.

When parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children, placing with a relative caregiver can have some advantages. Kinship Care reduces the trauma children experience when placed with strangers. It enhances children's sense of identity and self-esteem, continues the connections children have to their siblings and other relatives, and strengthens the family's ability to give children the support they need.

Kinship care often comes as a surprise to the both child and the relative caregiver. What does it mean to a child who can't live with their parents to know he or she is safe, loved, and has a place to belong?

Some answers to this question are offered in this small, but powerful book as children ages 5-17 from across Washington State relate their experience living in Kinship Care.

Some are funny, some serious or even sad, but all are sincere and offer testimony to the value, sense of family, and love each young author experienced in living with a relative caregiver.

Enjoy Reading!

Shelly Willis, Contest Coordinator



Thank you, Representative Eric Pettigrew!

The dedication for the 2009 Voices of Children Book goes to a man who has been a strong champion for families in Washington State- Legislative Representative Eric Pettigrew.

It is truly our pleasure to take this opportunity to recognize Representative Eric Pettigrew for his consistent advocacy on behalf of relative caregivers in Washington State. His leadership and steadfast support for caregivers has made a tremendous difference in our states commitment to, and support of, Kinship Care Families.

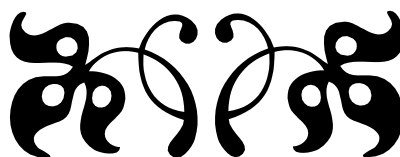
Representative Pettigrew has been a good listener and a man of action. His innovative approach to public / private partnerships, advocacy for vital legislation, and hands-on community support has helped to inspire others, change policies, and improve supports for Kinship Care Families.

Representative Pettigrew's leadership has been pivotal in inspiring collaborative partnerships, new programs and infrastructures intended to support relative caregivers. The state is a better place because of his thoughtful steadfast support. Thank you Representative Pettigrew!



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Voices of Children 2009

Winning Contest Entries

Please note: All entries were printed as received.

5-7 Years Old



I'm Papa's best buddy We go fishing.

Jenna
Age 6



My Mema is now my Momma. She defends me and my sister forever and I love her.

Nathan
Age 6



Winning Contest Entries

Please note: All entries were printed as received.

8-12 Years Old



I feel happy because Aunty Becky said yes. She has enough room in her heart and home for me and now I am adopted!

Dominic
Age 8



I feel good with my grandma because she always feeds me she doesn't just let me starve. And she let's me play with my friend Michael and lets me spend a night at his house, or he could spend a night at my grandma's house. She is like my mom and I don't want her to get hurt. She doesn't yell at me for no reason. She always gives me chances when I do something wrong. My grandma takes me to a lot of fun places. And to Oregon State to visit my uncles cause their going to play in a game. I love her from the bottom of my heart.

Marquise
Age 10



Winning Contest Entries

Please note: All entries were printed as received.

13-19 Years

I came into the world with a heart open and pure,
but being loved by my parents well that I wasn't so sure
I was mad at the world and crying in a corner as stiff as a
bolder.

Then I felt your gentle hand upon my shoulder.
My nights and days without you were filled with clouds of
gray.

I wished that all of this badness would just go away.
Through it all no one knew.

That when life felt like a war I'd been fighting
You helped me through and through.

I thought it was my fault.

At night I cried and tasted tears of salt.

Now I'm living with a good family with the clouds now

Emilia
Age 15



Love. The most valuable thing in my world. The most beautiful. The hardest ... Love means affection and gratitude and hope. Love means faith.

In the past I had no hope. I didn't know what faith was. I was alone in this world. After my fathers death I was brought into an odd state of mind where love didn't exist. I was abused, beat, tortured, neglected and starved. Through all the bruises no one seemed to hear my soul screaming for love ... No one but my Aunt and Uncle three thousand miles away.

They welcomed me into their home and their hearts. Love no longer meant pain. Hope no longer meant a possible meal. Faith was no longer praying to get through the day unharmed. Love had new meaning.

Love meant laughter; love meant success. Love brought me more than I ever would have hoped for. A family, an aspiration to help others, and best of all the knowledge of the bright future ahead of me.

Peggy
Age 17



Writings of Merit 5-7 Years of Age



"It's just me and my grandma and grandpa. They take care of me. They love me for always."

Tara
Age 5





My name is Mackenzie. I am 5 and my grandma adopted me and my 4 brothers. My grandma takes good care of me. She bought me a Easter basket and we will hunt for eggs on Sunday. We go to the pet store and to the park. I Love my grandma and I'm happy my grandma adopted me.

Mackenzie
Age 5



I snuggle with Grandmommy and work with Grandpa. I ♥ Auntie.



Charlie
Age 6



I had been living away with my parents for seven years. They were here in the USA and I was in the Philippines. It was indeed never an easy thing for me. Every night I was praying to be with the family I call my own. I had been longing for their presence, for their hugs and kisses. They visit me every year but it was not enough. I wanted my mom

Jomylene
Age 7

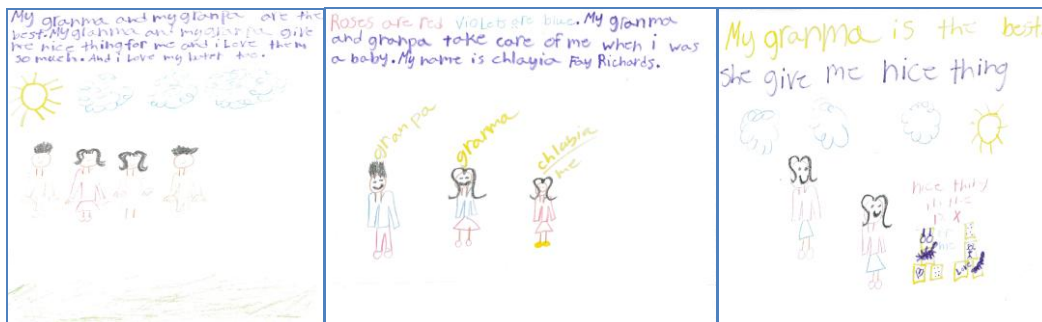
Writings of Merit 8-12 Years of Age



I love my Grammie. She makes me smile.



Alexis
Age 8



My grandma and my grandpa are the best. My grandma and my grandpa give me nice thing for me and i love them so much. And I love my brother too.

Roses are red violets are blue. My grandma and grandpa take care of me when I was a baby.

My grandma is the best. She gives me nice things.



The Bus stop

Grandma, Grandpa, brother, sister- I love them

Grandpa
Grandma me
brother

Today it's Easter. I am happy to have Easter today.

Chlayia
Age 8



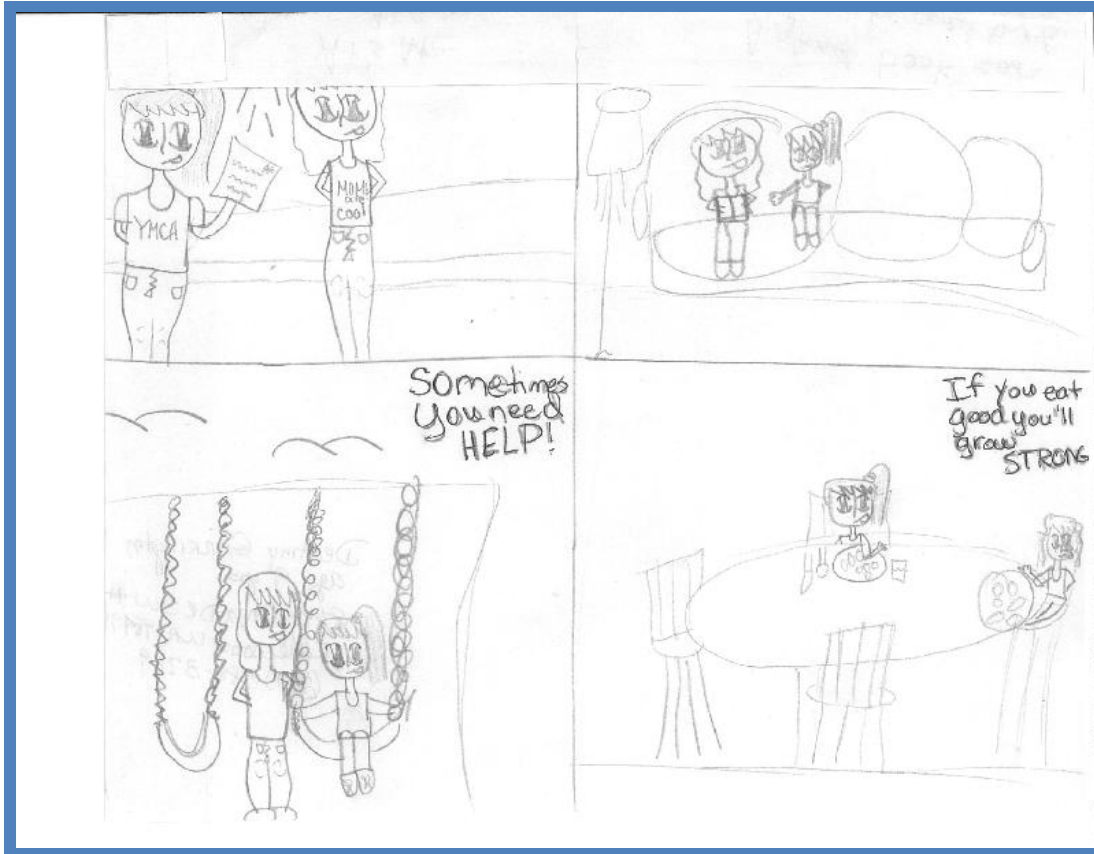


My story starts when I was nine months old. My mom left my dad and I lived with my mom for about two years. When my sister was born my mom worked for AT&T. A year later when my mom quit her job my aunt came to take care of us and that became permanent over time. We stayed like this for about 3 years and mom moved to Bellingham. We would visit for summer break but otherwise she came down here.

When I was 8 my dad came back and they decided to try re-unification counseling. Needless-to-say that didn't work. Now my sister and I live care free and see a little of everything, and that's how I've benefited from living with my aunt and uncle.

Kathryn
Age 9





My Grandma now my Momma

It has been great living with my grandma, here are a few reasons why. One reason why I love living with my grandma is that she provides most things for me like food, shelter, water, clothes, and most important love. She takes really good care of me when I'm sick and when I'm fine.

Another reason why I like living with her is because she always helps me and answers my questions. When I have trouble on homework she's always there to help.

Lastly, she always comforts me whenever I think of mom and dad who have died. She might cry with me but she talks me into thinking about the people who are still here, and love me.

Destiny
Age 9





My grandma means the world to me

Keeyshonna
Age 9





My name is Amelia. I'm 9 1/2 yrs old. Me and my brother and sister live with our Grandma. She teaches us to be good. We do our homework, clean our room and brush our teeth. She cooks us good meals. I know our Grandma loves us very much. She takes us places like to the movies and to the park. She likes to play games with us, she read us stories and we sing songs. My Grandma brought positive changes in our lives and we are very grateful to have her. We love her very much.

Amelia
Age 9

Heart Rose Love You!

Dear Nana

Nana, thank you for helping Mom with things and for taking care of me. You are the best grandma ever! Happy Every Day!

Love,
Madison, your granddaughter-Nana's rose

Madison
Age 9





My grandma takes care of me. She is helping me to develop and grow. My grandma pushes me to achieve my goals in school and compliments me when I reach them. She has taught me how to be humble and not get angry at the way some kids treat me. She always tells me to treat others like I want them to treat me no matter what they say or do.

My grandma pays for my clothes, shoes, my hair to be braided and toys to occupy me.

Saundra
Age 10





Hi my name is Coreena. I, and my older brother, live with grandma Crina. My other brother and little sister live with other grandma Brenda because my mom couldn't take care of us. I play basketball and run track every year. It's fun. My grandmother gave me the best birthday party ever. All my friends from school and my family members were there. My grandmother buys me food and everything else I need. I love my grandmothers and my family. I'm so happy that my name is Coreena and I'm happy that I have a family that loves me.

Coreena
Age 10





When I was two years old, my mom took a trip to Louisiana and she left us with our Auntie. It was fun until we found out that my mom passed away. My brothers and I cried, we fell asleep, and cried more. Now I stay with my grandma. My mom meant so much to me. She was so pretty and she loved all of her children and she would love for people to come over to her house. She was a special person everybody loved her and she was and still is so important to us.

I loved my mom a lot, but I also really love my grandma. She is a sweet person. She always reminds us to say our prayers at night. She makes me feel happy, important, intelligent and loved. She loves her grandkids and her kids.

Niesha
Age 10





After Aunty Becky adopted me I felt safe and loved in my forever home. But I will never stop loving Mom & dad.

Brian
Age 10





Before I moved with Grandma and Grandpa,
I had this: A Broken [heart]

After I moved with Grandma and Grandpa I have this: G.P. G.M. ME
LOVE

Marissa
Age 10





I love my family, I do, I do, I do.
I wouldn't trade them for anything would you?
Yes/sometimes they can be a pain, but you see
that's all part of the game.
What game you might ask, well it's the most
important task.
To keep a family together, we all have to play.
No one can skip turns, we all have to be there,
each and every day.
So you see, it is very, very hard to keep a family
together.
But still, I love my family, I do, I do, I do.

Keili
Age 11





First of all, I just want to say it is not easy growing up without your Mom. As I was growing up I lived with my grandma Brenda, while my mom was in Florida. Even though it was fun living with my grandma at the time, I did miss my Mom.

Then, my mom came to Yakima for Valentine's Day with her husband Mike, my little sister, and my baby brother. My mom had surprised all of us when she showed up. I broke down and cried because I haven't seen her for a long time. Last, she decided to live in Yakima, so since then we lived in Yakima. Until my Mom asked my baby brother's God-mom to take care of us for a while. After we were with my brother's God-mom Tia, we didn't want to go home at all. We wanted to live with Tia. So now we live with Tia and its so fun. We are getting smarter then we were. We will want to go to our mom's house only to visit not to stay and live with her. Thank you.

Daisha
Age 11





My grandma and grandpa are fantastic! My mother passed away when I was five years old and my grandma took me in her care and I'm so glad! She was always there for me when I was sad or mad and helped me with my problems. She is adopting my half sister who is 7 years old and I'm 11 years old. My grandma and grandpa are very loving and kind. I'm so lucky to have such good people in my life! I get to see my dad every Friday and I get to play his Wii game he got for Christmas! Once again, I'm so lucky to have such good people in my life!

I Love my family!!!

Kayla
Age 11





Have you ever thought about death? Have you ever wanted to die because your suffering? Have you ever stayed up all night crying? If you have then you are like me. You see, we are practically immune to pain (not that it does not hurt us). Three fourths of our lives is pain. We eat, drink and breath pain. It's like our own personal brand of heroine. Although we do want it to stop, we also want to find the source of it.

Its mainly our parents, wheather they're dead, sick, druggies or alcoholics. They are the reason our lives have hit a brick wall. But we have managed, yes? Not alone though. Wheather its a random civilian or a family member, we always get help. Most of us have survived because of these caring people. But we are not left unscarred. Our pain is worse than any other pain in the world. It controls us. It's not like braking a bone or anything like that. But more like being scorched with fire by our own parents. Imagine your own parents killing you. Being abandoned, and left to suffer.

It reminds me of Sparta, the Greek city. Whenever their "Doctors" said that a child was sick, the mothers would take the baby up to a mountain and leave it there alone. With nothing but a blanket to wrap it. The baby would die either of freezing to death, starving or being snatched by an animal. Once they die they will be leaving this world without knowing love or comfort.

If makes me so sad to here that stuff actually goes on. If I could take the place of that child I would. I would switch with them so that they could feel the love and comfort my aunt and uncle give me. Everyone deserves to be loved as much as my uncle and aunt love me and my sister. My aunt and uncle have saved me.

I have great grades, friends and a life. They allow me to take art classes in the summer, along with guitar lessons. I don't have very much chores. So I guess you could call me kind-spoiled, but I feel only love. They love me and I am very joyful that I can experience it. They are a dream come true.



Cassandra
Age 12



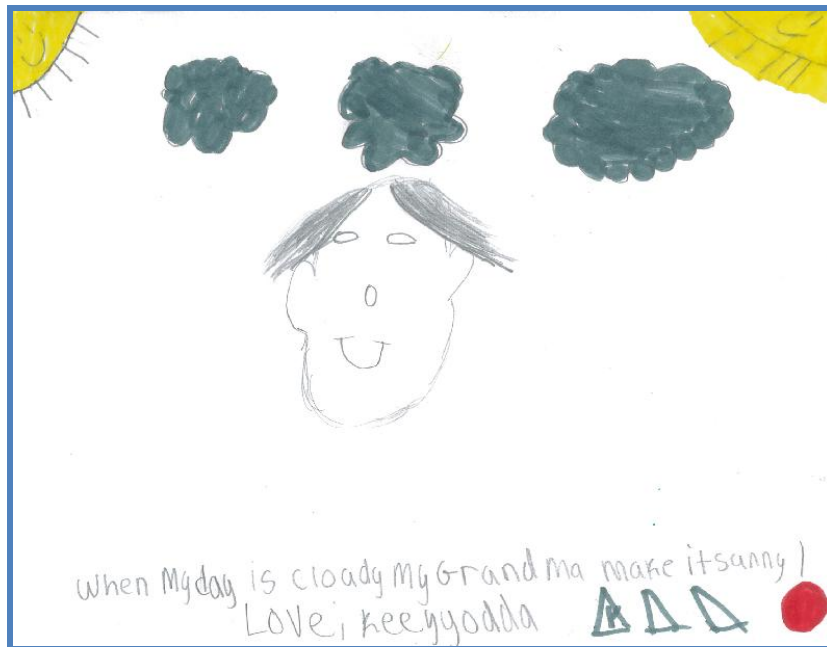
My brothers are getting adopted and I feel jealous and know I shouldn't because well there my brothers.

I have three brothers and there names are Brian (10), Dominic (7), and Nathan (6). Brian and Dominic both live at my auntie's house and me and Nathan live with my mom. I was adopted when I was 3 years of age and now my brothers are going to get adopted. Brian and Dominic are getting adopted by my aunt (Aunty Becky) and Nathan is getting adopted by me and my mom. Nathan has been living with us for ... WOW 5 years now. So it feels as if he has been living with us which he has just now legally. We all have the same bio. Mom but they have a different dad than me so they are like well ... 1/2 brothers to me.

So I feel super jealous because I want to be the only one adopted kind of like special in my own way. Well there adoption is on April the 2nd My mom is helping me out in so many ways she is the best mom ever. Thanks for listening to my story ...

Shaylynn
Age 12





When my day is cloudy my grandma make it sunny!
Love, Keeyyodda

Keeyyodda
Age 12

My Nanny was married living in Canada, but she got a divorce when she found out I was going to a foster home if a family member wouldn't take care of me. She gave up her marriage to move back to Spokane so she could take care of me.

I was only 2 1/2 years old when nanny came to Spokane, and were both very happy we're together. This June it will be are tenth year together.

My nanny is so great and sweet. I love her so much, she is kind, nice, and pretty. She love's playing games with me like sorry, we played several times, I won. Then when she gets me something I am always happy and feel special when we go and spend time together we go to the park and throw the ball to each other and when it's time to go we pack up and go home for the day and go to work on the kitchen.

I like living with my Nanny, she is always there for me, like when I first started spending the night at friend's house. I can call her any time in the night and she will come and get me.

Moneka
Age 12





My father "Jesus" is really 'cool'-
He helps me out when I'm in school;
He protects my relatives that I have known,
Including my Grandma with whom I live alone!

I love my "Father" with all my heart,
He gifted me with music from the very start.
Piano at six, Guitar at nine, --
Now I play the violin - I'm doin' fine.
My "Father" has done for me - a lot, as I
look up to Him for guidance as He has taught.

My Grandma loves me - and teaches me,
as she runs me about in our family's Taxi;
and the endless support,
She has in her heart for me.

"Thank you, Grandma!" For all that you've
done for me --
As I look up to you, and our "Father" respectfully -
as to the person I'll hopefully, someday - be;
as my Grandma takes me to many activities.

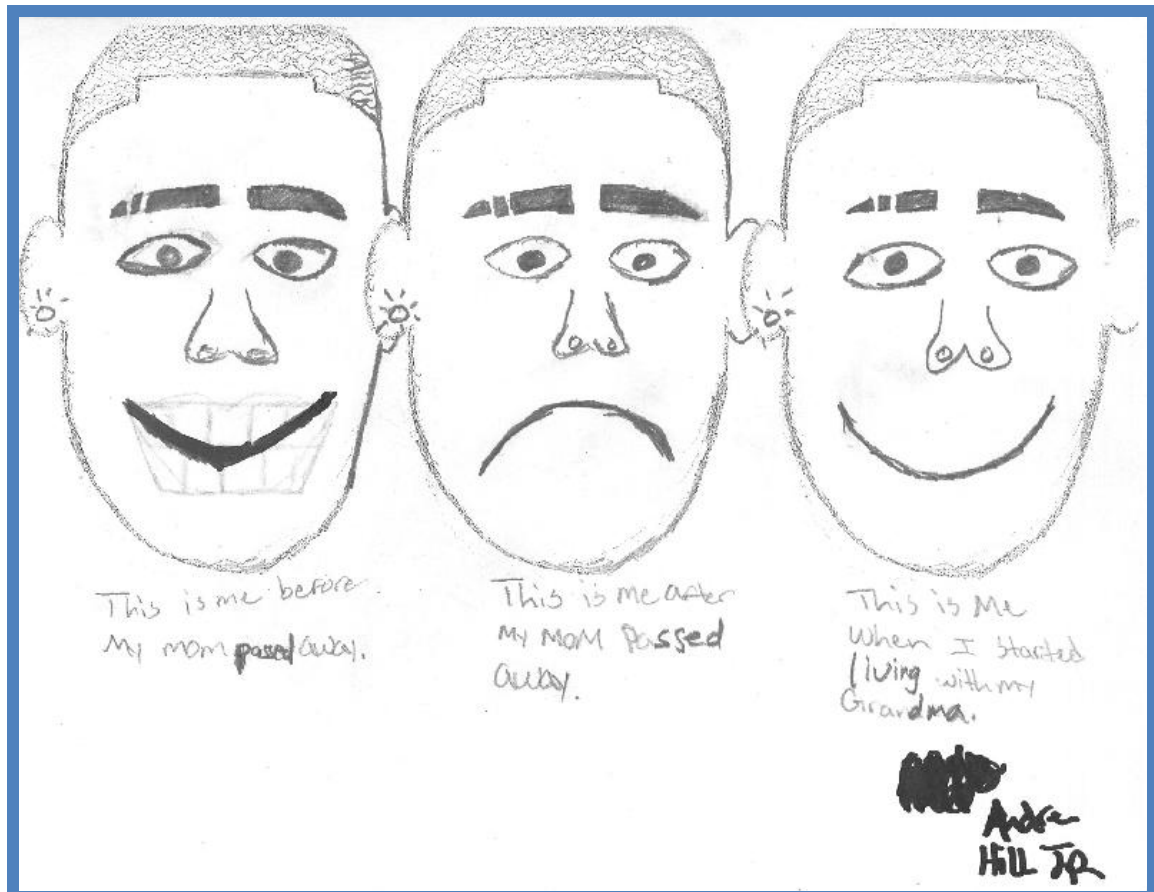
So, let me say it again - I love you -
With all my heart for all that you are to me



Elijah
Age 12



Writings of Merit 13-19 Years of Age



This is me before my mom passed away.

This is me after my mom passed away.

This is me when I started living with my Grandma.

Andre
Age 13





Living with my two aunts has meant a lot to me. I have lived with my two aunts since 2003. In that time a lot has happened.

Before 2003 I was living in a home with my biological mother and father who was in and out of jail. In May of 2003 I decided enough was enough and that I was going to move in with my aunt Carrie. My mother and father said "If you really want to, we want you to do what you think is best." So I did!

I moved in with Aunt Carrie and I became better in school and I gained a better outlook on life. She threw me a lifeline. Prior to 2006 Aunt Joy moved in with us, and they decided that they are going to adopt me and my brother Joey. It took D.S.H.S. several months to approve this.

August 16, 2006 I was 12 years old, and we stepped into the courthouse in Yakima. We were taken to a courtroom and we said "I do" several times and the judge pronounced our new last names.

Thank you Aunt Carrie and Aunt Joy for helping me and my brother set our feet on the ground.





Papa had raised me
When I was young and naive
And nowhere to go

He had shown me love
When I felt mad or blue
No matter how dumb

He opened his arms
When my Father closed his
Inviting love

Ritual we had
When I heard the Ice-Cream truck
Papa's change would jingle

A choice he gave me
Once a month I chose a show
Together we watched

Every Christmas day
My eyes would be tightly shut
To hide the presents

Random he taught me
So I could always be me
Accept me for me

Neika
Age 14





Living With Them Is Crazy
Life Is Crazy Though

One Day At A Time I Say All Because I Can't Let Go
They Love Me They Always Have
I Didn't Realize It Till The Other Day
When I Cried They Were There
To Give Me Their Shoulders And Their Ears

They Talked When Listened To
And Listen When Talked To
I Cant Believe I'm Loved So Much
Even After What I Did
I Left Them
And They Worried
They Looked
And They Listened
But Couldn't See Or Hear Anything

Codi
Age 15





Living with my grandparents has changed part of my life. For one thing, they take better care of me. They make sure I get the care I need. Also they didn't have to take me in but they did because they love me. They want me to finish high school and go to College. Sometimes it's a struggle being with your grandparents, but its better then what I had to deal with back home with my mom. I'm doing so much better here because one- I'm doing good in school, two- I'm in showmanship with my horse, and three- they love me enough to take me in. It has made a big difference on my life and I'm glad I have my grandparents.

Shelby
Age 15





My Story

I was born to Michael and Tammy in Spokane. WA. When I was three months old, Tammy called my grandmother (Michael's Mother) and quickly explained that she was in Jail and probably would be there for a while. My grandmother got on a Greyhound bus, in the snow, all the way from Everett to rescue me.

After living in fear that Tammy or someone else would come steal me, my grandparents received Parental Guardianship of me, so they could protect me. When I was little, I would still visit my birth dad, but at the age of six, I told my grandma what my dad was up to. Soon, Michael was incarcerated and my grandparents finally adopted me. They became my new Mommy and Papa.

God saved my life for sure. Tammy had other children, just to get money from the state, but never kept any of them. I believe that I was rescued so that I would have a heart and passion to rescue other children in need, and that is my plan. Leaving their house in the fall, better than I came, is another goal of mine.

Brittany
Age 18





I was drowning in the ocean of life with no one to pull me out. Then your hand came out through the storm and pulled me to safety. I never thought I was worth anything or would be anything in life. My Grandpa was there to hold me through the storms, wipe my tears and tell me I was an angel from god, from all the things I had been through and seen. He put all the good things back in my life, taught me how to smile, and made sure I knew my dreams are reality and he will do anything to make it happen. He made me feel like a blessing, being held by his great warm arms made me feel alive. I knew life was just beginning and I would never have to hide and be scared from anything again. He had given me my wings to fly and prove to the world that I really am something great!

Nicole
Age 18





LOVELY LADIES

Without great grandma, there's no me
Without grandmamma, there's no me
Without my momma, there is no me

Ladies made our Family Tree
Plus I love them all the same
And think of them all the same
Until my Momma walked away
Someday I will know that she's ok
Then grandmamma took her place
She took us all in...all six of us boys
That's how I know we are all safe
That's not all I have to say
Need something, just ask
Got it covered ain't no thang

Even grandma worked hard
And I appreciate that
So through this poem, I want
To give all my appreciation back

Them Lovely Ladies...Always taking care of their babies.

Philip
Age 17





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With Many Thanks

This booklet is a tribute to grandparents and other relatives of Washington State. It is a collaborative effort that could not have been possible without the support, guidance and partnership of those listed below. Thanks to each of you for your tremendous spirit and dedication to those we serve.

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For more information on the Washington State 2009 Voices of Children's Contest-email Shelly Willis at ShellyWillis1@qwestoffice.net or call 1-877-813-2828.

For more information on available resources for grandparents and relatives raising children visit the website: www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare.

Thank you to the millions of courageous and deeply committed grandparents and other relatives, who give of themselves so that the children they raise may live safely, know love, and have a sense of belonging to family.

